

# First Thessalonians

Bible Commentary 2021

by

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## 1 Thessalonians 1

### 1:1-4

When Paul wrote this letter he included the names of his coworkers. This is always an important point with me because it underlines the importance of working with others. Especially in the church and in the gospel it is necessary for Christians to work together. Jesus said the world will know we are his disciples by our love for one another. We see in these verses an example of Christian love in action as Paul included his brothers in this greeting to the Thessalonians.

This church in Thessalonica is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. God is three in one. There are people who attack the truth that God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But this is the true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Any other god men create is a false god. God was, and is, and will always be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If we reject this then we will reject that Jesus is God and man. If we reject he is God then we deny the incarnation and his sinless nature is in question. If Jesus had any sin he could not be the perfect Lamb sacrificed for us. Also, if he was not completely a man he could not stand in our place on the cross. He must be fully God and fully man for us to be saved and receive forgiveness of our sins.

Since Jesus is God and the Bible makes it clear that God the Father is God then how can we deny God is more than one person? He is three persons in one God. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Rejection of this is rejection of the gospel, and rejection of the gospel means a man cannot be saved or have his sins forgiven.

Everything depends on who God is. God's provision of salvation is himself. If we deny who God is then we deny the only way we can be saved and forgiven. We must know God in truth. We must know God as he is.

We cannot understand the trinity but we can believe what God revealed about himself. We can take God at his word and trust in him that he revealed the truth about himself. This truth is in his Son Jesus

Christ. Everything we know about God is revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ who is God's word to us.

Paul gave thanks for the Thessalonians. He thanked God for their faith, their love, and their patience. Paul gave thanks for them in his prayers. This is an example of praying for the church which we should follow. We should remember to pray for God's people. We should remember to pray for the church, and give thanks for the love, faith, and patience of God's people.

We can know we are the elect of God. How can we know this? Because we have believed the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

## **1:5-7**

Paul preached the gospel to the Thessalonians and when they heard it they knew it was not a man-made message. It did not come to them as philosophy or religion but it came with the power of the Holy Ghost and with much assurance. Paul not only convinced them of the gospel by his words but his life backed it up. The way he lived showed the truth of the gospel to them. These new Christians followed Paul's way of life and his example. When they heard and received the gospel it brought with hardship and trouble. Jesus promised this. He said in this world we would have tribulation but be of good cheer because he overcame the world.

The church in Thessalonica was an example of faith under fire. They endured with faith and love. Other Christians were inspired by them. Paul used this church as an example to other churches.

Many times the word of God will bring affliction into our lives, but it will also bring much joy in the Holy Spirit. There is a spiritual joy in following the Lord Jesus that the world knows nothing about. It is the joy of having a clean conscience and knowing you are in God's will. It is the joy of knowing your sins are forgiven and you are on your way to heaven. It is the joy that comes from knowing the Lord Jesus took our place at Calvary. He died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. In the same way that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead we also will be resurrected one day. We will be changed into our immortal bodies and will live with the Lord forever.

## **1:8-10**

The church of the Thessalonians was an example to other churches in Macedonia and Achaia. In what ways was their faith expressed and proclaimed? They turned to the true God from idols. They embraced the teaching that Jesus would return from heaven and deliver us from the wrath coming on the earth. They believed Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and would return again. This repentance and faith set them apart from other churches.

Each local church has something that will set it apart. Each church has a different testimony of God's grace. This church had the grace to believe the gospel that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and that he would also return again to receive them unto himself so that where he is they may also be.

What sets apart the true church from the false church. In today's world we are surrounded by men preaching a false gospel and creating false churches based on a false gospel. How can we know the true church when we see it? The true church believes the gospel that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and they are waiting expectantly for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth.

## 1 Thessalonians 2

### 2:1-4

When Paul preached the gospel to the Thessalonians it was not in vain. They believed the word and were saved. They turned away from idol worship to the living God and his son the Lord Jesus Christ.

We get some history of Paul's missionary work. He shared how he suffered at Philippi, but even after this persecution he and his co-workers were not afraid to continue to preach the gospel. This should tell us something about his conviction about the message he preached. Our willingness to continue to preach the gospel despite persecution and hardship shows the gospel we preach is the truth.

Paul reminded them that since they suffered for preaching then it demonstrated they did not have bad or selfish motives in their ministry. Their work was not motivated by self-interest.

When they preached the gospel it was not in order to please men but instead to please God. Only men whose hearts are free from self-interest, covetousness, and greed can truly preach the gospel fearlessly and boldly as it should be preached. The more we are interested in ourselves the less truthful our message will be. We may even preach the truth but it will be with little power if our hearts are focused on ourselves.

### 2:5-8

Why did Paul remind the Thessalonians that he did not use flattering words or a cloak of covetousness? The simple reason was that there were other people who did use flattery and disguised their covetousness as sincerity. People pretend to be sincere when instead they are sharing God's word to provide for their own needs. There are people who teach the Bible simply to make a financial living from it. Paul wanted to put himself completely outside the circle of those who preached the gospel for self-interest or for motives of self-profit. He proved this by suffering and going without. He proved his motivations by working with his hands and supplying his own needs while he preached the gospel.

Being a burden on others was something Paul avoided. Why? He could not be effective in reaching people with the gospel if he was a burden on the people he was trying to reach. It would cause people

to doubt his sincerity and motives. Therefore, he tried hard to never be a financial burden on other people.

Paul compared his actions and attitudes as "gentle", and compared this with how a nurse took care of a patient or a mother took care of a young child. It was with tenderness, patience, and understanding.

He not only gave the gospel but he shared his life with them. It is a mistake to only share information, or tracts, or give away Bible, but never give ourselves. We come alongside those we reach with the gospel. We are supposed to walk with them, live with them, share our lives with them. God did not just give us a book, did he? No, he gave us himself in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should do the same.

## **2:9-12**

Paul and his coworkers labored night and day. Why? Probably because they preached in the day and worked in the night. Or vice versa.

They worked and served in ministry to stop the accusations of those who implied they had wrong motives. The enemy will send people with false accusations against those who work in the ministry. One way Paul was able to defeat these accusations was to prove his sincerity by not allowing this church to support him financially. They could not accuse him of preaching the gospel in order to profit from it financially. This is how much Paul loved the Lord and also loved this church.

At times this same strategy might be necessary so it is wise from any one who works in the ministry to be ready to also work in the world to raise their own support. Most of my life this has been the case. We work to support ourselves and try to be a witness for the Lord where we find ourselves. This seems to be the pattern in my life.

Paul's relationship with them was like a father with his children. He exhorted them to live a life worthy of being a Christian. We need these kind of Christians in our life. We need others to exhort and encourage us in our walk with the Lord.

## **2:13-16**

It matters how we respond when we hear the gospel. Some people hear the gospel and treat it like it is a man-made story or something ancient humans created. They receive the gospel as if it were the word of a man. However, the Thessalonians received the gospel as the word of God. They heard the message Paul preached and recognized it was the word of God.

People in the church do this. They have heard so many sermons it no longer impacts them as it should. They listen to preaching as if it is entertainment or stories made up by the man standing in the pulpit. No, the gospel is not from man. It is the word of God.

The word of God has an effect on people, no matter if they believe it or not. For those who believe it has the effect of saving their souls but for those who do not believe it has the effect of hardening their hearts. I've noticed this when I share the gospel with people. For some it brings them into the light of who God is. For others it drives them further into the darkness of their imagination.

Paul mentioned suffering and persecution as a normal part of the Christian life. It not only came from religious people but also from the world through government. Eventually the religious world and the political world unite against the Lord and against his people. This is the pattern in the Bible.

## **2:17-20**

Here we see Paul's "glory" and "joy" were Christians. What does this tell us?

Paul pointed to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus returns he will sit as the judge over every believer and will reward each one. What do you think Christians will be judged for?

Paul gives us a clue. Paul's reward on judgment day was somehow related to the people he brought to Christ.

We see this in the life of Jesus. Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

What was the joy which was set before the Lord Jesus when he went to the cross?

The joy of the Lord is the salvation of souls. The joy of the Lord is people who are redeemed from their sins and from the hand of the devil. This is the joy of the Lord.

Now compare this with what Paul says: "Ye are our glory and joy."

Our reward will be people brought to Christ and those we encouraged in Christ. This is our reward. There are only a few things which are eternal. God's word is eternal. The souls of men are eternal.

Paul was hindered in his ministry by Satan. Satan hindered him. We should take note of this. There is a spiritual enemy who opposes every Christian. Never underestimate this. Remember to be vigilant for our adversary is like a lion who prowls around looking for someone to devour.

## **1 Thessalonians 3**

### **3:1-4**

Paul recognized the danger of afflictions to the faith of the Christian. What was Paul's reply to the attack on the faith of the Christian? His reply was to send people to reassure those who were afflicted that they were appointed to this by God. How was that comforting?

Those who do not believe the gospel can never understand how this brings comfort. But for those who believe the gospel it is comforting to know that God sees us. He knows exactly what our circumstances are. He in fact allowed these afflictions for his own purpose.

The Bible teaches us many possibilities for why Christians suffer afflictions and persecutions. However, we need to realize first of all that God is in control. We need to acknowledge the fact that God is over all. Nothing in our lives will happen without God's permission. Nothing happened in Job's life without God's permission. When we get hold on this we will realize that God is taking us somewhere and that destination cannot be attained without suffering.

The Bible says that even God's own Son Jesus learned obedience through the things which he suffered. Read Hebrews 5:8.

When we take up the cross, deny ourselves, and follow Jesus we can expect we will suffer affliction. This is a normal part of the Christian life.

Suffering works for good for a Christian. It is not wasted. For the unbeliever suffering makes them more bitter and causes them to flee into the darkness of their soul. The darkness in the souls of men is a bottomless abyss.

By seeing our circumstances through the eyes of faith in God we move toward holiness, righteousness, purity, and wholeness. The afflictions of this life only work to further sanctify those who trust and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We will not be damaged by the fire of the furnace but instead will be purified.

### **3:4-8**

Is it possible for the "tempter" to undo the work of the ministry? Apparently this was a fear which Paul had in his ministry. The Thessalonians suffered afflictions and Paul was concerned that these problems would expose them to temptation. What kind of temptation? How would these Christians giving in to temptation cause Paul's labor to be in vain? These are serious questions we should ask ourselves. Paul took this possibility to heart and took action to prevent it. He sent Timothy to make sure they were sound in the faith and unmoved by their afflictions.

Affliction makes us vulnerable to the enemy. The enemy will use every opportunity to destroy our faith in Jesus. When people suffer they are vulnerable to temptation. Paul knew this and we should recognize this in our lives. Suffering, affliction, and difficulty will draw the enemy to attack us. If you are knocked down you can be sure he will show up to kick you in the ribs when you are down. So get up! Don't stay down if at all possible. Be on guard when you go through hard times. You have more to be concerned about than just your afflictions. You also need to make sure you keep your eyes firmly fixed

on the Lord Jesus. Abide in the gospel. Remind yourself constantly that God loves you and that Christ died on the cross for you.

Paul's joy in life came from knowing his work in Christ was successful. When he heard they stood firm in their faith in the Lord Jesus he felt relief. His life was wrapped up in the ministry, to see people come to saving faith, and then teaching them to walk in victory in the Lord.

## **3:9-13**

Paul pushed toward a final goal in verse 13 where he described "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". Paul wanted to make sure they were ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't think his exhortation implied that they could lose eternal life. Instead, I think he was concerned about their meeting the Lord Jesus. We do not want to be ashamed at his return. How is it possible for a Christian to be ashamed when the Lord returns?

We need to give serious thought to the return of the Lord Jesus and how this affects our daily life. The Lord Jesus taught us to watch and pray. We need to be alert so that we do not live like the world. They live in darkness but we are in the light. We need to live like those who are in the light.

Paul wrote: "unblameable in holiness before God". This process of becoming holy is accomplished in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to live for God in our own strength. Instead, we rely on the Holy Spirit. We have a choice. We can choose to cooperate with the Holy Spirit or continue to live like the world. The world is described as people who live in ignorance and unbelief. They have a hard heart and a continual lust for stimulation. Unbelievers call this "living life".

Paul prayed the Lord would allow him and his coworkers to return to them so he could teach them. He wanted to make sure they were ready for the return of the Lord. He wanted them to be ready for the day of the Lord. This is an issue which should concern every pastor of God's word. What are we doing if we are not getting people ready to meet God? What are we doing? Why are we doing this?

We need revival. We need to put aside doing church as we have in the past and find a new way to gather together and encourage one another in the Lord. May the Lord bless us with revival and a renewed expectation of his return.

## **1 Thessalonians 4**

### **4:1-8**

Paul gave commandment from the Lord to live a clean and holy life. What did this mean? In context, this pointed to a life of sexual purity.

This was a problem in Paul's day and I bet it is a worse problem in our world today. How many Christians fill the pew on Sunday struggle during the week with sexual temptation?

We cannot make excuses because we live in the last days. We are living in a time that is like the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. Still, we cannot make excuses. We cannot allow any excuses for immoral behavior just because we live in such a dark time in history. Instead, we need to go back to the Bible. What does scripture tell us?

We are to learn to possess our vessel in sanctification and honor. We need to understand that our body and spirit are one. It is a deception to separate what is of the body from what is of the spirit. The parts of man are combined together in one man. What we do with the body affects the spiritual life. What we do in our spirit affects the body. Therefore, we need to recognize we are a whole person.

The lie of the enemy is that what we do with the body does not matter. This was the lie which the culture in Paul's day taught people. They tried to say that what was of the spirit was good and it did not matter what a man did with his body. But it does matter. Spirit and body are one. What we do with one affects the other.

God has called us to live a holy life. We should never forget this even if we struggle with temptation and fail. Our goal is to be holy. This is not an impossible goal which the Lord put before us.

As we humble ourselves and confess our sins to the Lord Jesus he gives us grace to continue to get on our feet if we fail. We must continue to believe and have faith that we are called to complete purity and holiness before God. We cannot turn away from this standard.

Some Christians give up because of continued moral defeat. However, we must remember that our relationship with the Lord Jesus is based on what he did for us. He has cleansed us in his precious blood. He loves us. He will never give up on us. He will always help us overcome temptation and will not turn his back on us if we fail. Continue to trust in God's grace and goodness and believe that you can grow through failure.

## **4:9-12**

This church was taught by God to love one another. Not everything we learn about the Christian life comes from a human teacher or preacher, but much of it comes from God himself teaching us. God taught these Christians to love one another. Not only did they love the Christians in their local church but they loved the Christians in their entire region. Paul exhorted them to continue to love and allow their love to increase more and more.

We are taught to be productive. We are to have work that we are engaged in which provides for our daily needs so that we can live a life that no one can reproach or condemn. We are taught to be productive, to have lack of nothing, and to live an honest life toward people outside the church.



This is one way in which Christians reach the world for Christ. We go out into the world and act as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We share the gospel by living the Christian life in the world and then as opportunity arises we share with others why we live in such a way.

## **4:13-18**

Paul said he did not want them to be ignorant, but I'm afraid many people are ignorant of what Paul taught here.

When Paul preaches the return of Christ he did so in the context of encouraging them about their loved ones who had died. He did not use the word "died" but instead "asleep", which followed the example of the Lord Jesus when he said Lazarus was "asleep". Jesus said to the sisters of Lazarus that he was the resurrection and the life. When Jesus comes back he will raise from the dead all those who believed in him.

Paul did not want them to grieve like those who had no hope. As believers in the gospel we have a glorious hope in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus died for our sins on the cross, he was buried in a tomb, and he rose again from the dead on the third day. This is our hope. Those who have put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will also be raised from the dead. For those who believe in Jesus they never really die but just enter a better life with God.

Then Paul gave a detailed description of the return of the Lord. He said that those who are alive and remain at the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have died. The dead in Christ will rise first. Then those who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. The event which Paul described in these verses is commonly called in English "The Rapture". It is the great catching away of God's people into the heavens. It will happen in the twinkling of an eye.

Prepare for this day for it will surely come. Prepare yourself by putting your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and eternal life.

## **1 Thessalonians 5**

### **5:1-3**

There will be a time when great change will happen on this planet. That season and time is upon us even now as I write this. We are in the last days. Why did Paul say he did not need to write to them about the times and seasons? Because Jesus covered this in detail. The Lord told us what the times and seasons of the last days would be like.

Jesus taught us that he would come as a thief in the night. Now, we see a specific prophecy through Paul describing details about the last days that pinpoints us in that time frame. When "they" shall say

"Peace and Safety". Who are "they"? "They" are the world of unbelievers. This points to those who only know the world system life. They do not know about God's kingdom or the return of the Lord. "They" will be saying "Peace and safety". Why would they say this? Because it will be a time of intense war and rumors of wars. We are living in that time. I've heard prominent politicians already in our day and time quoting these words "peace and safety".

Sudden destruction will come to this world. Most likely it will be a nuclear holocaust. Scripture says "they will not escape". There will be no where to run when this sudden destruction comes on the world.

Will the Lord Jesus rapture the church before this sudden destruction? From what I can see in the Bible the pattern is that God delivers his people before judgment strikes. I see this with Noah and the flood. I see this with Lot and Sodom. What is the pattern? The Lord knows those who are his, and those who trust in him he will not fail to rescue from the judgments that are coming on this earth. Read Proverbs 3:25-26.

## **5:4-8**

The word "darkness" has different shades of meaning in these verses. When he said that the brethren are not "in darkness" he meant that they have knowledge of upcoming events. They know about "the day of the Lord", which the general world population is in the dark about. They are ignorant of events in the future which the Christian knows about because we believe what Jesus taught and what Paul expounded on here. The day of the Lord is sure and it is coming toward us. The world in general never gives a single thought about this and if they do it is to scoff at it.

Then he changed the meaning of darkness when he said we are "children of light" to mean that the Christian is morally different than the world. Light and darkness become metaphors not only of knowledge about future events, but also describe the moral condition of the believer and unbeliever. Knowledge of the future in the Bible and a person's moral condition, therefore, are tied together in the mind of Paul. It is more evident to me the further I've traveled that when I walk close to the Lord the truth of Christ's return is more real to me. In other words, the second coming of Christ has a direct impact on our moral lifestyle.

Paul also used another analogy or metaphor when he described the armor a Roman soldier would wear and applied this to the spiritual life of the Christian. Faith, love, and hope are real spiritual armor and weapons. The real battle is not the material one but it is the spiritual battle which takes place in the souls of men.

This is why I am convinced that the most important thing we can do for any problem in our world, including the environment, is to preach the gospel. At the heart of every problem is the problem of sin. There is only one answer to this problem: the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **5:9-11**

God has not appointed us to wrath. There are many people who take this verse to mean that the church will be raptured before the seven year tribulation and I agree with them. I agree it makes sound Bible logic and sense that God would take out his people before the judgment in the book of Revelation falls on this world.

What is the pattern in the Bible? We see God delivered and saved Noah and his family during the flood. We see that God saved Lot and his family from the judgment upon Sodom. We see in the Bible that God delivered his people every time he poured out wrath on the ungodly world of unbelievers. During the time of famine in Elijah's day God saved a remnant of people.

I believe we can look forward with confidence as the signs of the last days fall on us that God will save us from his wrath. God has not appointed his people to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## 5:12-15

These verses raise a question about what it means to be "over you in the Lord". If we think like the world system thinks then we get the picture of a pyramid or hierarchy. This is a top down system where everyone over you is like a boss who tells you what to do and you have to serve those who are over you. Is this what it means to be "over you in the Lord". I don't think so.

Go back and read again what Jesus taught his disciples about giving people titles. Go back and understand the distinction which Jesus made between Gentiles who lorded it over their subjects and how people should interact with one another in the church. If you can wrap your mind around that then come back and read Paul's description of those who labor and work in the church. They are over others in the church but in what sense? In the sense of the world system? Or, in the spiritual sense which the Lord Jesus outlined for us?

Being over someone in the church does not describe a position but rather a responsibility of oversight or service. Being "over" others in the church means we have a responsibility to serve and care and nurture and come alongside others and to know them.

Paul said those who do not directly work in the church show also "know" those who labor among them. They are to hold them in honor because of the work of the ministry they are engaged in.

There are distinctions made in how we relate to one man or another. Some can be corrected in a straight forward manner. Others need to be patted on the back and encouraged. Others need to be reasoned with. There are different ways of dealing with each individual. How will you know what to do? You must know the person. You must live with them, talk to them, listen to them, walk beside them. If you do not do this you cannot obey the instructions of dealing with each individual person in an individual manner. There is no one shoe which fits all. The only way you can find what shoe fits is to get down on your hands and knees and measure that man's foot. We must humble ourselves, in other words. There is no hint of lording over others within the church in Paul's instructions here.

## 5:16-28

Rejoicing in the things of the world or this life are temporary joys. However, when we rejoice in the Lord we can rejoice forever. If we turn our heart to the Lord and rejoice in him then our joy will know no end. Praying will help our joy as it keeps our heart and mind focused on what truly matters. Only what is eternal truly matters and we should set our heart on it. It is natural to set the mind only on what is temporary and passing away but investing our mind, heart, and emotions into what is eternal will help us now and forever. As we rejoice and pray then we will find the ability to give thanks in everything. No matter if we are well provided and protected or if we face scarcity and danger the heart that is set on the Lord can always give thanks, always pray, and always rejoice in the Lord.

If we are to overcome temptation then we must flee from the appearance of evil. Those who do not abstain from the appearance of evil will eventually find themselves trapped by it.

We have a promise from the Lord. He is faithful. He will keep us, correct us, provide for us, protect us, and we will find everything we need in him.

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